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AUTHOR Mostert, Mark P.; Nuttycombe, Deborah G.
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ABSTRACT

There are differences in how preservice, novice, and expert teachers view effective teaching. This study traced conceptual changes among preservice teachers at different points in their preparation; investigated whether there were differences in perceptions of students in the elementary and secondary programs; and examined how second and fourth year preservice teachers (N=33) viewed teaching by asking them to observe and critique a videotaped lesson taught by former Secretary of Education William Bennett. Students took observation notes while viewing the lesson, and wrote short critiques identifying instances of effective teaching and instances of less effective teaching. Content analysis of their critiques revealed no discernible differences between elementary and secondary education majors. However, comments differed both in quality and frequency for second-year compared to fourth-year students; second-year students noted surface characteristics of the lesson and appeared more subjective in their judgments of the observed teaching process; fourth-year students demonstrated more objectivity, linking their perceptions to the teaching process rather than the teacher. Studies such as this one may suggest ways of imparting expert traits to preservice teachers at an earlier phase of their development. (LL)

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Prospective Teachers' Perceptions of a Teaching Episode

Mark P. Mostert

Deborah G. Nuttycombe

Commonwealth Center for the Education

of Teachers

Curry School of Education

University of Virginia

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ABSTRACT

There are differences in how preservice, novice and expert teachers view effective teaching. Inexperienced teachers attend to fewer specific teaching activities when viewing a lesson, possibly because they lack frames of reference to classify teaching activity as relevant or irrelevant.

This study investigated how second- and fourth-year preservice teachers view teaching by asking them to observe and critique a videotaped lesson. Content analysis of their critiques revealed differences in the two groups' views of effective teaching.

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Northeastern Educational Research Association, Ellenville, New York, November, 1990. Thanks to Great Morine-Dershimer for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

Prospective Teachers' Perceptions of a Teaching Episode

Introduction

Recent research on teacher education has examined how preservice, novice and expert teachers view effective teaching (Grossman & Richert, 1988; Livingston & Borko, 1989; Sabers, Cushing & Berliner, in press; Strahan, 1989; Weinstein, 1988). Some researchers have characterized learning about effective teaching by examining which aspects of teaching teachers attend to at different stages of their teaching careers (Berliner, 1986; Carter, Cushing, Sabers, Stein & Berliner, 1988). This study compares observations of a teaching event by two groups: elementary and secondary preservice teachers at the second and fourth year levels of their five-year teacher preparation program.

Assuming that learning about teaching is sequential, this study investigated whether such a progression was observable among preservice teachers at different points in their preparation. A second area of interest was whether there were differences in the perceptions of students in the elementary and secondary education programs. This study was part of a larger study that compared the usefulness of three different data collection devices for tracing conceptual change in prospective teachers (Morine-Dershimer, 1990).

Method

Informants

The informants in this study were secondary and elementary education majors in the second and fourth year of the five-year teacher preparation program at the University of Virginia. Thirty-three students observed and commented on a videotaped lesson. We used a stratified random procedure (academic level and certification area) to select 24 responses for analysis.

Data Collection

The lesson observed was one taught by then-Secretary of Education William Bennett. Bennett taught a high-school history class using Madison's Federalist Paper No. 10, so content was generally familiar to all students. The technical quality of the lesson was excellent, having been videotaped and broadcast by C-SPAN. The tape had previously been analyzed by four expert observers using alternative observational systems. These descriptions were readily available to the research team.

The informants viewed the beginning twenty-minute segment of Secretary Bennett's lesson. Prior to viewing, we briefly described some background on the lesson and identified the teacher. We then provided the students with specific instructions, directing them to (a) take observation notes while viewing the lesson, (b) review their notes, and (c) write a short critique of the lesson. In writing the critique, we asked them to identify and explain their thinking about: (1) instances of

effective teaching or aspects which they considered to be strong points of the lesson, (2) instances of less effective teaching or aspects which they considered to be weak points of the lesson, (3) one way in which they might change the procedures used in the lesson if they were the teacher, and (4) additional information that might be helpful to them in improving their critique of the lesson (that is, questions they would like to have answered in order to better evaluate this teaching episode). The students submitted both their notes and critiques for analysis.

Data Analysis

For purposes of this report, we analyzed the portions of the critiques describing the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. Content analysis led to development of a descriptive category system which we revised to yield a system that could be used to analyze data across the three tasks in the larger study (Morine-Dershimer, 1990). The other two tasks involved development of concept maps of effective teaching (Saunders & Tankersley, 1990) and a computerized Kelly Repertory Grid interview leading to identification of characteristics associated with effective teachers (Artiles & Trent, 1990). The category system is outlined in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

In the following sections, we provide sample responses for each of the categories. We then discuss comparative group patterns of response related to the preservice teachers'

perceptions of strengths and weaknesses observed during the lesson. Finally, we compare and contrast these perceptions to those of the expert observers.

Results

General Patterns

Table 2 presents sample comments made by students in their critiques of Secretary Bennett's lesson. These comments are organized by major category, and by reference to either a perceived strength or perceived weakness of the teaching. It is immediately clear that some of the aspects of the interactive events were generally identified as strengths by students (e.g., Curriculum: Reference to past events), while other aspects were noted as strengths by some and weaknesses by others (e.g., Curriculum: Use of text). No aspect (sub-category) of the observed teaching was generally identified as being only a weakness.

Insert Table 2 about here

Group Patterns

There were no discernible differences between elementary and secondary education majors in the frequency of comments about various aspects of Bennett's lesson (see Table 3), or in their emphasis on strengths versus weaknesses of the lesson.

Insert Table 3 about here

However, there were marked differences in the responses of

second-year students compared to fourth-year students. Second-year students made more comments overall than fourth-year students (see Table 4). Also, second-year students generally had a more positive perspective on the lesson. While the fourth-year students maintained a rough two-to-one ratio of strengths to weaknesses, the second-year students commented in the ratio of three-to-one. In addition, the quality of the comments about strengths and weaknesses of Bennett's teaching also differed for the second-year compared to fourth-year students.

Insert Table 4 about here

We investigated the qualitative differences of the student comments in both years to see whether the data reflected their learning about teaching. We suspected that second-year students comments would be more diverse and disconnected than those of fourth-year students, who would be in more agreement concerning their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson. The second-year students' view of teaching weaknesses involved generic criticisms of Bennetts' personal manner or teaching style--comments that could easily be applied to an appraisal of any interpersonal communication rather than specifically to teaching. Some felt that Bennett's interpersonal relationship with the students was abrasive, abrupt, and inconsiderate of the students' feelings. For example, one respondent noted: "I found his weakness to be in interacting with the students...his relations with the students I found to be ineffective. On

occasion he interrupted students...His strong sharp voice was intimidating to those who were not so knowledgeable of his lesson." Others echoed this perspective: "At one point he continually interrupted a student," "The one thing I find as a weak point in his teaching is in the way he projects himself. He gives off a very stern attitude." Specific descriptions of teaching behavior were few.

In contrast, the fourth-year students were more economical and specific in their criticism of teaching approaches. Some students were critical of Bennett's lesson introduction, holding that "...he needed to give a better introduction review of what has been covered to date. He might have stated his goals more clearly at the beginning." Another negative related to Bennett's lack of wait-time when questioning students: "He left very little wait-time after his questions and often provided his own answers." Related to the wait-time problem, several fourth-year students noted Bennett's fast pace: "The main weak point was the rushing of the lesson. He was definitely under pressure, but I felt that he was rushing the students' answers too much." Another student succinctly expressed what many of her peers apparently believed: "...at times he seemed to be rushing the students in their answers, and he even occasionally interrupted them; he frequently said 'okay' and 'all right' in a time in which the student may have taken the response negatively as well as positively..." Some students took Bennett to task for failing

to check for understanding ("He didn't really check for class understanding. He would ask general questions and allow one or two people to respond"), failing to provide necessary definitions ("I believe that some of the words that he used should have been clearly defined in order to be sure that the entire class understood."), and for his failure to hold students accountable for the answers they gave ("There may have been more widespread attention [from the class] if he had somehow held the students accountable for the information [they presented]."). These students also referred to other weaknesses related more specifically to teaching strategies, such as Bennett's lengthy reading from the text, his lack of organization of the lesson, and the way he used clarifying questions.

A similar pattern emerged in appraising Bennett's strengths. The second-year students were more generous than the fourth-years in assessing Bennett's teaching. Their disparate, generic comments illustrated their personal involvement with what they viewed. They found Bennett entertaining ("He was not boring," and " Mr. B. throws in jokes, and students laugh at some"), personable ("He occasionally makes comments as a sort of ice breaker, for example, his comment on penmanship"), confident ("He is confident on front of the class, in terms of good eye contact, loud voice projection, and reliance upon his own thoughts...") and attention-grabbing ("...he was very emphatic in his use of hand movements..."). They were also impressed by the Secretary's

authoritative air: "He conveyed an obvious knowledge of the topic he was teaching and made that evident through his confidence and the use of quotes..." These examples illustrate perceptions of style over substance.

The fourth-year students were more cautious in their accolades. They showed more awareness of teaching substance as applied to the potential transfer of knowledge. They felt that Bennett built on student ideas by the use of good questioning, the restating of answers, and by relating the content to the students' frame of reference. One respondent observed that she "...like[d] the way he built upon student comments and applied these ideas to their own world," while another perceived that "He poses very good questions and prompts students well. He also does a good job of reinterpreting and relating student's responses as well as tying the lesson in to life today."

Another fourth-year perception indicated that Bennett was adept at integrating the text into the lesson ("...he backed up ideas and responses with sections of the text"), that he provided mini-summaries along the way ("...he kept recapping what they had discussed and discovered," "Halfway through the lesson he reviewed the progress so far...to show the students where they were headed,"), and that he reshaped student answers to questions to direct learning ("Once they got the answer, or came close, he would clarify or restate the answer"). They further noted Bennett's challenges to the class, and his firm guidance and

lesson focus. When personal qualities were mentioned, the fourth-year students saw them as being supportive to specific teaching strategies rather than a teaching quality in their own right: "His authoritative presence is an effective teaching tool."

In summary, comments differed both in quality and frequency for second-year compared to fourth-year students. Second-year students clearly noted surface characteristics of the lesson and appeared more subjective in their judgements of the observed teaching process. The fourth-year students demonstrated more objectivity, linking their perceptions to the teaching process rather than the teacher.

Discussion

It appears that teacher attention to, and monitoring of, teaching activity is partly a function of level of learning (Carter, Sabers, Cushing, Pinnegar & Berliner, 1987; Sabers, et. al. in press; Weinstein, 1988, 1989). The perspectives of the respondents in our study offer further support for these prior findings.

Furthermore, our analysis indicates that many respondent comments were literal descriptions of what they saw, a phenomenon documented elsewhere (Berliner, 1986; Clark, et. al., 1987, Sabers, et. al., in press). Comments were more descriptive than interpretive. Students were much more likely to state what Bennett did, than to comment on why he might have done it.

There was also general agreement in the aspects of the lesson that were attended to across academic level and certification area. This may indicate the preliminary formation of common learned professional perceptions, referred to by Carter, et. al., (1988, p. 11) as the "reduction of variance."

While the students in our study reflect the typically underdeveloped perceptions of preservice teachers, they clearly mention pertinent aspects of effective teaching that were also commented on by the classroom observation experts. Rosenshine (1986) mentions Bennett's attention to students, his modeling of academic behavior for the class, and his frequent references to the text of Federalist No. 10. Shuy (1986) notes Bennett's ability to summarize and to chart a definite course of procedure, as well as his ability to get the students to do what he wants them to do. He also criticizes Bennett's questioning techniques as limiting students' ability to think for themselves. Eisner (1986) refers to Bennett's general intensity, calling him "William the Cat" (Eisner, 1986, p. 325), and comparing him to a prize fighter as he rolls up his sleeves and attacks the lesson. Eisner also says that the students are challenged. Peterson and his colleagues (1986) note Bennett's use of higher order questions, his provision of corrective feedback, and his use of many examples related to concepts discussed.

Although all participants in this study were preservice students, their responses differed according to academic level.

Across all categories the second-year student's response frequencies were much larger, mainly because they reported more strengths than did the fourth-year students. The more experienced fourth-year students reported lower frequencies of observations. Their observations, however, related much more specifically to teaching, possibly because they have learned more about what constitutes important teaching activity than their second-year peers. They focused more on the teaching process, while second-year students focused more on the teacher's persona.

All of the student sub-groups (academic level and certification area) emphasized the three major categories in the same relative order. The highest number of responses for both strengths and weaknesses were for Instruction, followed by Curriculum, and then Social Context. In the two associated studies, some different patterns of response were observed. For the concept mapping task, Saunders and Tankersley (1990) found that students emphasized Social Context most heavily, followed by Instruction, and then Curriculum. Second-year students focussed on Context (especially personal qualities of the teacher) more heavily than fourth-year students. For the Kelly Repertory Grid task, Artiles and Trent (1990) also found that students emphasized Social Context most heavily, followed by Instruction, but on that task there were almost no references to Curriculum aspects of effective teaching. Morine-Dershimer (1990) concluded that task characteristics influenced students' reported

perceptions of effective teaching.

While the results of this study tend to support some emerging teacher education theories, interpretative caution is necessary. The data used were collected in a single exercise, and the teacher was a well known figure. Results might have been different if data collection involved observation of several lessons segments and assessment of an unknown teacher. Also, the artificiality of video may have affected responses. Generally, using cross-sectional designs in research to explore preservice perceptions of teachers and how they learn about teaching needs to continue. This research may eventually suggest ways of imparting expert traits to preservice teachers at an earlier phase of their development.

Appendix A

Year One
No teacher education courses.

Year Two
EDHS 201 Teaching as a Profession
EDHS 288 Lab and Field Experience

Year Three
EDES 301 Learning and Development
EDIS 388 Lab and Field Experience

Year Four
EDIS 408 Teaching Exceptional Individuals
EDIS 488 Lab and Field Experience
EDIS 501 Curriculum and Instruction
EDIS 502 Instruction and Assessment
EDIS 505 Classroom Management
EDIS 514 Teaching Methods *

* Secondary students only.

Table 1

Coding Summary

Codes apply to both strengths and weaknesses.

Code	Subcode	Type of Response
Curriculum	Content/Materials	References to current/past events. Use of text. Content of lesson to future events.
	Student Outcomes	Student interest, confidence, opinions, comprehension.
Instruction	Instructional Processes	Use of questions. Use of wait-time. Pace of lesson. Participation. Attention.
	Lesson Structure	Emphasizing important points. Use of examples. Defining terms. Form of presentation. Summary and reviews.
Social Context	Personal Quality of Teacher	Confidence, authority, enthusiasm, sincerity, ambience, high expectations, non-verbal communication.

Table 2

Examples of Comments in Lesson Critiques

CURRICULUM

Strengths Noted	Weaknesses Noted
Content and Materials: References to Current and Past Events	
Mr. B. related the main ideas to present day situations and to aspects with which the students can relate.. ..relates materials to things students can comprehend. Mr. B. tells class he just read an article that related to the lesson. I think this was great. It allowed students to see that he was interested in the subject, and also shows how it relates to today's events.	
Content and Materials: Use of Text	
A strong point of Mr. B's is that he brought the original text into discussion. Because he quoted from the book a fair amount and read the notes very quickly. I think that this missed out on the effects...	I did not think his many uses of quotes added to the discussion.
Student Outcomes	
..he agrees with the students that this is difficult work, but he continues to encourage them that they are moving along..	(students) might have lost interest. Students can't come to conclusions on their own. ..he puts down some of the answers he got without trying to modify them and get that student to think harder. He just restated it and got someone else who would answer it better.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Personal Qualities of the Teacher	
He is confident in front of the class in terms of eye contact, loud voice projection.. ..obvious energy.. He added humor and smiled to make the class fun. He was very entertaining to watch, and he drew the attention of the participants. His authoritarian presence	..abrupt.. ..abrasive.. He paces back and forth. ..sarcasm..

is an effective teaching tool.

Table 2 (cont.)

INSTRUCTION

Strengths Noted	Weaknesses Noted
Instructional Processes: Use of Questions	
These questions were thought provoking, made the students recall what they had read, and kept them on their feet thinking as the teacher lectured. When he asks questions he often pushes the students for more than their original response. He states "keep going" to get at the base of what he is looking at. He doesn't just give up after one reply. ..bringing students into the lesson.. ..tried to involve the entire class..	B. had definite opinions as to what Madison was writing about, and so was looking for specific answers from the students. He transformed (student) comments into his opinion. He was pouring information into student's heads.
Instructional Processes: Lesson Pace and Wait Time	
He keeps the class moving. The lesson flowed; it was easy to follow. He waits for a response when questioning.	..too fast.. ..confusing.. He rushed students in answers. He did not allow students enough time to respond. ..interrupted students' answers to move on to another question.
Lesson Structure: Introduction	
..great introduction. He gives content background at the beginning of the lesson.	I think he needed to give a better introduction and review of what has been covered to date. He might have stated his goals more clearly at the beginning.
Lesson Structure: Summary and Periodic Review	
..stopped and summed up what had been said in order to give the students a full picture of what was going	He generally drew the main conclusions himself and did not have the students make any summaries.
Lesson Structure: Maintaining Focus	
B. built on the students' answers and the whole lesson was growing to a main point. ..(he) signaled that an important point is coming. ..writes key phrases on the board.	

Table 3

Total Number of Comments in Each Category
by Students in Two Certification categories

	Elementary (n=12)		Secondary (n=12)	
	Strengths/	Weaknesses.	Strengths/	Weaknesses.
Curriculum				
Content/Materials	20	2	18	1
Student Outcomes	19	11	10	10
TOTALS:	39	13	28	11
Instruction				
Instructional Practices	30	22	26	24
Lesson Structure	16	0	18	3
Evaluation				
TOTALS:	46	22	44	27
Social Context				
Personal Qualities of Teacher	27	4	24	7
TOTALS:	27	4	24	7

Table 4

Total Number of Comments in Each Category
by Students at two Academic Levels

	2nd Year		4th Year	
	Strengths/	Weaknesses.	Strengths/	Weaknesses
Curriculum				
Content/Materials	27	1	11	2
Student Outcomes	18	12	11	9
TOTALS:	45	13	22	11
Instruction				
Instructional Practices	34	27	22	19
Lesson Structure	20	0	14	0
TOTALS:	54	27	36	19
Social Context				
Personal Qualities of Teacher	34	5	17	6
TOTALS:	34	5	17	6

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